

WILD

THE WILD

“WILD” is where we step out of the kitchen and, while learning new techniques, connect firsthand with ingredients. On a personal level, how do you go farm-to-plate or field-to-plate? Put another way, do you have what it takes to cope with an extended power outage or a long camping trip? This section is intended to make you uncomfortable. It will force you to question yourself, your limitations, and your beliefs. View it as an exercise.

To quote Lucius Annaeus Seneca, born 4 BCE:

“Set aside a certain number of days, during which you shall be content with the scantest and cheapest fare, with coarse and rough dress, saying to yourself the while: ‘Is this the condition that I so feared?’ . . . Let the pallet be a real one, and the cloak coarse. Let the bread be hard and grimy. Endure all this for three or four days at a time, sometimes for more, so that it may be a test of yourself instead of a mere hobby. Then, I assure you . . . you will leap for joy when filled with a penny worth of food, and you will understand that a man’s peace of mind does not depend upon Fortune, for, even when angry, she grants enough for our needs.”[‡]

There are, however, tools that help you endure, and that’s where we’ll start.

TOP GEAR SURVIVAL: TARPS, TRAPS, AND TACTICAL KNIVES

This gear section is offered for fun, as a collection of toys I kept after testing hundreds of options.

In other words, you don't have to buy anything. Some of the most practical items, like the survival fishing kit, will be covered later. For those interested, I had to cut more than 50 pages of gear-related craziness that answered questions like:

- What does an Armageddon-proof billionaire compound look like, based on real-world specs from hedge fund managers?
- Is it possible to purchase an "up armor" Humvee from Serbia for the cost of your Prius? (Yep.)
- If a major disaster hit cities like NYC, SF, or L.A., what are the best escape methods and vehicles?

Find these cut sections and more at fourhourchef.com/extras.¹ In the meantime, enjoy my short list, for entertainment purposes only. The most helpful tools will appear again.

STARTERS

1. Guardian Two-Person Survival Bag

\$95

Hard-core survivalists won't settle for this, but if you're a busy person looking for decent disaster insurance, this is a one-click (mostly) all-in-one option. This backpack contains emergency blankets, water purification tablets, roughly 5,000 calories' worth of food bars, waterproof matches and a lighter, a first-aid kit, a waste disposal bag, and so on. I keep it at home in a closet and toss it in the car before remote road trips. The components don't last forever, so replace every five years.

2. Leatherman Surge Multitool

\$70

If you had to choose one tool for indoors and outdoors, this is it. Whether fixing that stupid dresser drawer, tweezing fishing line, or breaking down a 500-lb animal, it can get the job done.

3. Coghlan's Fire Paste

\$7

Odorless and tasteless paste for starting fires, even in damp conditions. Bootleg version: rub cotton balls in Vaseline and store in a film canister. Don't leave the trailhead without it.

4. Lockpick Set

(Prices vary)

Author Neil Strauss's favorite lockpicks are Eric Michaud's. SerePick, run by an ex-Marine, makes an excellent set of "Bogota" picks, as well as universal handcuff keys, Kevlar survival cord, and diamond wire blades for all your daily urban-evasion needs.

5. ThermaCELL Bug Repellent Appliance

\$17

DEET- and odor-free, this small appliance heats a chemical film that creates a 15 x 15-ft bug-free zone for up to 48 hours. This will save your sanity if camping or hiking in mosquito-infested territory for several hours or days. It's not incense, so don't breathe it in.

6. Trumark Wrist-Braced Slingshot

\$6

I have always loved slingshots (sorry about shooting out the car windows, Mom), and this model remains almost unchanged since 1953. Great for informal target shooting on tin cans, etc. (called "plinking"), it can also be effective at close range for small game like rabbit.

7. Daisy ¼" Slingshot Ammo

\$6

You won't be taking down any charging rhinos with these. They're strictly for target practice. For getting food, you'll need rocks or at least ½" ammo.

8. Magnesium Fire-starter

\$10

Magnesium shavings are less foolproof than fire paste but are a more common alternative. To use them, you will need both tinder and a blade to shave off the magnesium and strike the flint (the black edge).

9. Highgear Trail Torch Mini Lantern

This pocket-size device, which can be used as a lantern, flashlight, or beacon, has been discontinued. I love it, but reviews are all over the map. For consistent positive reviews, I recommend the Coleman MicroPacker compact lantern (\$13) as an alternative.

All of these items
can be found at
[FOURHOURCHEF.COM/
WILD-GEAR](http://FOURHOURCHEF.COM/WILD-GEAR)

¹ They'll be put up over time in a series.



THE MANUAL ARTS

“The noncook is in a helpless position, much like that of the car owner who can’t change a tire and has to depend on mechanics to keep his automobile running.”

—RAYMOND SOKOLOV, *HOW TO COOK*

“According to the map, we’ve only gone four inches.”

—HARRY, *DUMB & DUMBER*



Is this your image of a hunter? Georgia Pellegrini, author of *Girl Hunter*.

(CREDIT: T. KRISTIAN RUSSELL)

Georgia Pellegrini didn't start off as a hunter.

She graduated from Wellesley and headed to Wall Street, which she later deserted to attend the French Culinary Institute (FCI) in New York City. In no time flat, Georgia was working alongside the best in the business at restaurants like Gramercy Tavern and Blue Hill at Stone Barns. It was at the latter that she had to slaughter her first turkey. This was a pivotal moment in her life and sparked her exploration of “field-to-table” eating.

Through Georgia, I met Doug, a lifelong Napa resident who's only been to San Francisco twice, even though it's a mere 1½ hours away.

He can tell the difference between delicious cocora mushrooms (popular with Roman emperors) and deadly nightcap mushrooms, which look nearly identical. He knows how to dive for abalone, and if deer are in season, he's in deer season. He never hunts the morning after a full moon, as the animals had been out to feed the night before. If the trout are running, he knows exactly where to find the best steelhead.

Doug hates being indoors as much as I was resigned to spending most of my life there. Rather than battle the physical world, after all, I'd chosen to master the digital, just like all of my friends.

Georgia's father jokingly refers to her (and my) generation as one of "manual illiterates." He's absolutely right:

- My dad can fix his car if something goes wrong. I cannot. Take the most basic of emergency tasks, changing a flat tire. I'd done this once or twice and long since forgotten everything. Changing the oil by myself? Forget it.
- My dad can splice wire, fix basic electronics. I cannot.
- My dad and granddad could navigate the outdoors. Nothing fancy, but the basics. I cannot. Put 10 of my closest friends from SF in the wilderness with no trails, no iPhone, and no GPS? They wouldn't stand a chance.

After two events, I realized all this could be a very serious problem.

EVENT 1: THE 12-HOUR WAKE-UP CALL

Three months after meeting Doug, I awoke on a Friday at 10 a.m. to move my car.

Standing barefoot on my doorstep, I could see that I'd beaten the meter maid. No ticket. Instead, I found a form letter from Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E): due to construction, they were shutting off electricity and water on my street, a quaint four blocks, from 8 a.m.–6 p.m.

The lack of tap water and toilet water would be annoying, I thought, but no big deal. I had a Brita pitcher full of water, which would last me a few hours. If I needed wireless, I could always go to a café, but maybe a half-day vacation from the Internet was exactly what I needed?

Amidst these thoughts, I walked back inside to make breakfast. The gas was still on, but I had to ignite the pilot light (electrical) with a match. For this minor victory, I gave myself a hearty pat on the back. I then

shuffled sideways and opened the fridge to grab eggs . . . and that's when I tilted my head like a Labrador.

Condensation was dripping off of everything. All the food, including nearly \$200 worth of frozen meat, had been thawing and creeping toward room temperature for two hours. One of my good friends, Neil Strauss, had long ago told me to get a generator, and I'd dutifully put it on the "someday" nice-to-do list.

Now, "someday" had arrived. But how hard could it be for a resourceful young guy with a car, iPhone, AMEX, and no 9–5 job to get organized? Starting at 10:30 a.m., the sequence of events looked like this:

- Call Cole Hardware, which has *everything*. The line is busy after three calls, so I drive down. No generators, but they recommend a construction supply store and call ahead, confirming that generators are in stock.
- I drive to the supply store and am told they have no generators. After 90 minutes of insisting, I find one remaining unit. It's for construction sites, costs \$500, and is the size of small whale shark. It takes two people 30 minutes to get the 200-lb beast into the back of my Volkswagen Golf. Just as I'm about to leave, I realize that I need a gas container (another 20 minutes of searching), and I have to stop at a gas station to purchase fuel.
- I get home close to 2:30 p.m. (four hours after starting) due to unexpected traffic. It takes me almost an hour to get the generator out of my car and up a 14-step patio flight of stairs. Resting a minute before the second leg indoors, I notice a huge sticker: "WARNING: Never use indoors. This generator produces carbon monoxide and can kill you in minutes." Fuck balls. I do not have 50-ft extension cords and concede defeat. Life: 1, Tim: 0.

- Now it's 4 p.m., and I decide to clear my head with a walk. I'm not alone. A half-dozen neighbors are doing the same, looking frustrated. Nearing the end of my block, I hear an oddly familiar "thump, thump" sound, which leads me to an open garage. There, I find a man who's done things properly. He has a small generator, easily one-fifth the size of mine, powering his refrigerator via extension cords. He's duct-taped a tube onto the exhaust release, and the carbon monoxide is going straight out a window. I strike up a conversation with "Bob" and ask him about the make and model. It is a Honda EU2000i, the preferred generator for die-hard "Burners," as he points out. Burners are attendees of the annual Burning Man event, which takes place on the Nevada salt flats and lasts more than a week. The mantra: bring everything you need, leave nothing. I'd been twice, which explained why I recognized the sound.

- By 5 p.m., two more men have discovered Bob's "thump, thump" and are asking if they can borrow it. His tool was what everyone needed and he was now the unenviable center of attention. One man became flustered and almost insistent. But how could Bob let them use it and not have his own food spoil?

He couldn't.

And that's when, fortunately for Bob and everyone else, the power went back on.

All of my refrigerated food went into the garbage, but a third of my frozen food was still usable. At the end of the day, a mere four blocks had been off the grid for less than 12 hours. It wasn't an "event," let alone an emergency, and I'd lost nearly every ounce of food, not to mention all of my potable water.

What if it had been 24 hours? 48 hours? 72 hours?

I ordered the Honda EU2000i.

EVENT 2: NERT

One fair-weather afternoon, I received the following e-mail from a friend:

My girlfriend and I will be attending six NERT (Neighborhood Emergency Response Team) classes in the Marina from 6:30–9:30 p.m. on Mondays starting next week.

At the end you get a cool vest, hat, and badge that can get you special access through checkpoints, etc., in case of an emergency, as well as a good idea of how to survive the chaos that would inevitably follow a major disaster.

If anyone wants to join us, you can get more information at sfgov.org/sffd/nert. If there is an earthquake in the next 30 years (as is often predicted) or any other major disaster, it could save your life. The training is free and is sure to be an interesting look at the world we live in.

NERT was created by the San Francisco Fire Department. I signed up out of curiosity. Our first session, early on a Saturday morning at Bayside Police Department, started off with a question.

"How many people live in San Francisco?" asked the instructor, a police officer, of the 50 or so volunteers.

Correct answer: "More than 800,000 residents in the city."

If we count commuters or the SF-Oakland-Fremont triangle, there are more than 4 million people. In fact, San Francisco is the second-most densely populated large city in the United States after New York City.

Next question: "How many fire trucks do we have in the city of San Francisco?"

Guesses from the crowd: "50?" "100?"

Answer: "19."⁴

The room fell silent. We were left to soak in the reality for a few seconds.

⁴ Somewhat freaked out by this, I found out later that there are an additional 43 fire "engines," which are equipped with hoses and water but lack the ladders, rescue equipment, and other tools of a fire "truck."

“What this means,” the officer continued, “is that if there is a serious disaster like a big earthquake—let’s say 6.9 or higher on the Richter scale, which is almost certain in the next 20 years—it might be a while before anyone comes to save you.”

Following that, we dissected the logistics of SF as a city: how the water functions, historical fires and patterns, average deployment time for state and federal emergency teams, etc. Every fact underscored the necessity of trained civilians, and explained the existence of NERT. We could be “activated” like benevolent splinter cells via phone, walkie-talkie, or ham radio to help address chaos.

The most important realization was a sobering one: “It could take 7–10 days for a real team to get to you.”

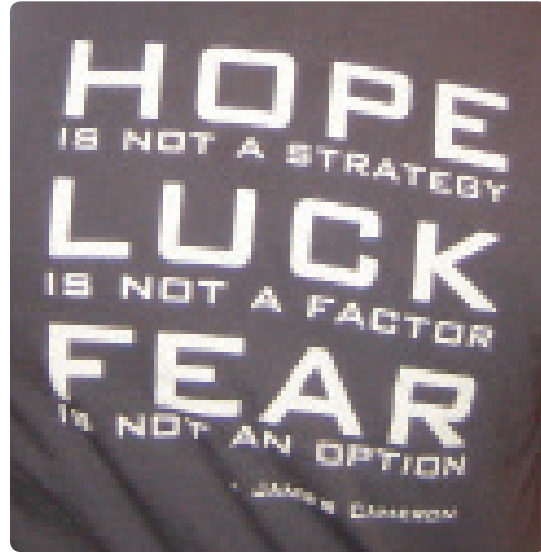
We were assigned homework for that weekend: go home and practice turning off your water and gas. Other students got more ambitious, deciding to go 24 hours without water or power. I was in the former group, and though a small step, the dress rehearsal in self-reliance felt great.

All along, I wondered: *how on earth have I not learned this stuff?*

Sometimes you go to the wild, and sometimes the wild comes to you (e.g., Hurricane Katrina).

Knowledge of basic improvised cooking is cheap insurance in a complex world. Plus, it’s a blast.

Looking out your window and seeing food where other people see weeds is fun. Being ahead of the eight ball and 99% of the population? That’s fun. Playing catch-and-release with pigeons at the park? Beats the hell out of *Seinfeld* reruns. Some of the skills we’ll learn can be viewed like CPR: you never *want* to use them, but in the unlikely event that you *need* to use them, they’re a godsend. And, not to be undervalued, you’ll get outside for a change.



The James Cameron quote I used to get through my last book deadline, which I now apply to much more. This shirt was given to all staff working on *Avatar*.

The heart of this section (in more ways than one) is a portfolio of new techniques you can use anywhere, whether in a kitchen, a forest, or a parking lot.

But before we get to food, there are a few other survival check boxes to tick. Let’s start with the Rule of Threes.